

Interview with Aunt Harriet Smith, Hempstead, Texas, 1941

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Harriet Smith: And you ask me any words you want to ask me about a slave, you know, back, and uh, I can remember.

John Henry Faulk: Well Aunt Harriet about how old are you?

Harriet Smith: Well I don't know Mr. Faulk. I really don't know my age, only by the, the children telling me, of course. My ma died, and she, and she didn't know nothing about our age. But the children traced back from the ex-slave up to now.

John Henry Faulk: Well how old were you when you were [*Harriet Smith interrupts*]

Harriet Smith: Well, I was about thirteen years old at the break up.

John Henry Faulk: Uh huh. Can you remember slavery days very well?

Harriet Smith: Of course. I can remember all our white folks. And all the names of them, all the children. Call every one the children's names.

John Henry Faulk: Who, who did you belong to?

Harriet Smith: J. B., the baby boy.

John Henry Faulk: Where was that? Where did he live?

Harriet Smith: Back, out here in Hays County.

John Henry Faulk: Sure enough? How many, how many of, how many slaves did he have?

Harriet Smith: Well, he had my grandma, and uh, and my ma. My ma was the cook, and grandma, you know, and them they worked in the field, and everything. I remember when she used to plow oxen. I plowed, I plowed oxen myself.

John Henry Faulk: Is that right?

Harriet Smith:I can plow and lay off a corn row as good as any man.

John Henry Faulk:Is that right?

Harriet Smith:Course I can.

John Henry Faulk:Well good for you. *[John Henry Faulk and Harriet Smith overlap]*

Harriet Smith: Chop, and chop, pick cotton. I used to pick, I've pick *[unintelligible]* here since I been here. I've *[unintelligible]* pick, pick my five hundred pounds of cotton.

John Henry Faulk:Knock out five hundred pounds.

Harriet Smith:Knock out around five, five hundred pounds of cotton. Then walk across the field and, and hunt watermelons, pomegranates and *[laughs]*

John Henry Faulk:That's a *[unintelligible]*.

Harriet Smith:Yeah.

John Henry Faulk:Well Aunt Harriet, do you remember church times?

Harriet Smith:Yes, I remember church time. I remember how *[John Henry Faulk interrupts]*

John Henry Faulk:You remember during slavery times *[Harriet Smith interrupts]*

Harriet Smith:Yes, I remember how our folks, they had prayer meeting from one house to another.

John Henry Faulk:Uh, the colored folks.

Harriet Smith:Yes, I think it was *[unintelligible]*. And over at the houses you know, they'd be in the section, a house, and at different places they'd go and we'd have prayer meeting. Ma and pa and them would go to prayer meeting. And dances too.

John Henry Faulk: And dances too?

Harriet Smith:Yes. I've seen pa and ma dance a many a time.

John Henry Faulk: Is that right? During slavery times?

Harriet Smith: Right. My grandma too. My grandma was name R. P.

John Henry Faulk: R. P.

Harriet Smith: Yes. But she belong to the B.'s. [*mumbles*] That's, that, what she went by, her husband's name. Sure is, that's way back. Now in slavery time, there was my sister, my brother was a slave back. And all of them stayed but me and one, one of the girls and she lives in San Antonio. A. T.

John Henry Faulk: A. T. She, she was your sister?

Harriet Smith: Yes. She's in the young bunch. Sister Ida, and she was the next, brother George and sister Ida and myself were slaves. And the others was born free. And all of them, we the only two in slavery times.

John Henry Faulk: Well I declare. Did you go to meetings? Did you ever go to church?

Harriet Smith: We would go to the big house, prayer meetings you know. We children would put us in the corner you know. We was dared to cut up too.

John Henry Faulk: Is that right?

Harriet Smith: Yes, they'd carry us to prayer meetings.

John Henry Faulk: Well did you go to the white folks' church any?

Harriet Smith: Yes. I went to Mountain City to the white folks' church many a time. You see the white folks would have church in the morning, then they'd let the colored people have church at their church in the evening.

John Henry Faulk: That was during slavery time.

Harriet Smith: During slavery time, yes. During slavery time. I can remember that just as well as [*John Henry Faulk interrupts*]

John Henry Faulk: Well what would the preacher preach about in them days?

Harriet Smith: I don't know. I didn't go. He'd preach about you know, maybe something or another.

John Henry Faulk: They didn't preach like they do today?

Harriet Smith: No. They wasn't educated, you know, and they uh, uh, would, would tell you how to do, and how to get along, you know, and how to treat the white people and so on. And they'd read the Bible then, you know, [*mumbles*]. Yeah, I remember all about in slavery time. Ma and them used to go to dances with the white folks.

John Henry Faulk: Well did they treat, did the white folks treat you good? Did you [*Harriet Smith interrupts*]

Harriet Smith: Why, the B.'s?

John Henry Faulk: Uh huh.

Harriet Smith: They was good to us. Good. They never whipped none of their colored people, our colored people. They'd take big saddle horse, Mrs. B's saddle horse, big gray animal, and she'd have them riding. Grandma would ride to Mountain City to church. They had white preachers there. Mr. P., he was one of the preachers that lived across from us.

John Henry Faulk: Well would the white preacher tell you to behave yourselves and be [*Harriet Smith interrupts*]

Harriet Smith: Oh yes, they [*John Henry Faulk interrupts*]

John Henry Faulk: Be good to your master and mistress?

Harriet Smith: Oh yes. That's what they preach. We, sure, didn't know there was any such thing as God and, and, and God, you know. We thought that was a, a different man, but he was our master. Uh, our white folks, you know, preachers would refer to the white folks, master, and so on that way. Preach that way. Didn't know no better. All of them, all of them would go up there to church. Then after we come to be free, you know, they begin to, preach us, you know. They, we begin to know, you know, there was a God and so on.

John Henry Faulk: Well, well, while you all were slaves did they teach you to read and write?

Harriet Smith: Nuh huh.

John Henry Faulk: Did you all go to school any?

Harriet Smith:Nuh huh. Uh, uh, they didn't know nothing about reading and writing. All that I knowed they teach you is mind your master and your mistress.

John Henry Faulk: They sure didn't teach you any reading and writing?

Harriet Smith:No, they didn't. No. When I picked cotton, I remember then picking cotton, farming
[John Henry Faulk interrupts]

John Henry Faulk: Well did you ever hear of any slaves being mistreated? That, were there any tales going around in those days about that?

Harriet Smith: Uh, nuh huh, uh, yes, I know of times they, when, when they mistreated people, they did, and I hear our folks talk you know, about them whipping you know, till they had to grease their back to take the holes from the, the back.

John Henry Faulk:Good Lord have mercy.

Harriet Smith:Them white folks were that a way. But them B.'s sure didn't allow their colored people be whipped. Their horses, their saddle horses, Mr. B's saddle horse and ma and pa and them wanted go anywhere, they, they rode their horses and the saddle. Mountain City to church, and the children stayed home *[unintelligible]*. Then, that on then, from one to another they begin to learn, town preachers in amongst us. They'd have prayer meeting, you know from one house to the other you know how the house, like there's a house sitting here in a section, in line, you know, and people would come to prayer meeting. And then they, Sunday in the evening the white folks would let the preacher preach, let our folks go to their church for preaching.

John Henry Faulk:Well do you remember any of the songs they sang in those days at churches?

Harriet Smith:No. I, I, if I had the books, I could maybe look, look and see. I know they sang the song, they sang the song, "Are We Born to Die?" They'd sing that the colored church.

John Henry Faulk:"Born to Die." How did that go, you know?

Harriet Smith: *[mumbles]*

John Henry Faulk: Yes, a little louder.

Harriet Smith: Yeah, yeah.

John Henry Faulk: How'd it go?

Harriet Smith: Yeah. They'd sing "Are We Born to Die?" [*unintelligible*] I was little. I would sit back. I never went much. We children, we stayed at home, parched corn and play you know. Little children. Ma and pa and them and grandma would ride the horses, about two miles from our home, white folks' home, where they stay, and go to the white folks' church. I used to hear them laugh and tell it all the time, you know. We didn't know anything about freedom at all. There was three. There, there was me, and my oldest, next oldest sister and my brother George. He was, uh, [they-they're] all dead. All of them's dead but just two of us.

John Henry Faulk: Well, uh, can you remember when the war was going on?

Harriet Smith: Course I can. I've sat on the fence at the time, me and cousin M., and cousin S., and all of us. Our yard had white picket fence around it. The road went right along by our house like this road goes along by my house. We sat on that, stood on that picket fence. All day long we seen them soldiers going back to San Antonio and different places. I had the [*unintelligible*] they'd blow them bugles. Them horses was ??? and dancing and all just like that.

John Henry Faulk: Well what do you know.

Harriet Smith: Colored soldiers`.

John Henry Faulk: Colored soldiers?

Harriet Smith: Poor colored soldiers in droves. Went right along by our house. Our home, it was a two story house, the white folk's home, you know. And we stayed on the home until we bought a home, uh, it was over across the creek where we living. [*unintelligible*]

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